

# PLANNING BRIEFS

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## AMHERST RECEIVES 105 COMMONWEALTH CAPITAL SCORE

Of 130 communities who submitted Commonwealth Capital applications for Fiscal Year 2009, Amherst tied for tenth in the Commonwealth with a score of 105 points.

The Commonwealth Capital program was established four years ago to promote more sustainable land use choices in Massachusetts cities and towns. The Amherst Planning Department has submitted the Commonwealth Capital applications on behalf of the community since the program's inception in 2005. The Town of Amherst's previous scores were: 94(FY2008), 113(FY2007/06), and 100(FY2005).

The Commonwealth Capital program endorses planning and zoning measures and municipal policies and actions that are consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles.

The program examines thirty-two (32) aspects of a municipality's implementation of zoning, planning, housing, environmental, energy, and transportation measures in place at the time of the application or measures that the community commits to implementing during the next fiscal year. The resulting scores are used, in part, to determine the distribution of financial assistance and grants from the Commonwealth.

For Fiscal Year 2009, the Commonwealth Capital application was developed and submitted by the Planning Department with assistance from other Town departments. This year's score will play an important role in the evaluation and distribution of more than \$600 million in state grants and low interest loans.

Whether it's through the development of a Master Plan, completion of an Open Space and Recreation Plan, implementation of mixed use zoning principles or continued energy efficiency measures, Amherst prides itself on its progressive approach to local governance. Amherst citizens, Town Meeting members, over 50 volunteer boards and committees and Amherst's professional staff all play a critical role in keeping Amherst an innovative and forward-thinking community. Through its annual applications to the Commonwealth Capital program, Amherst remains competitive and eligible for financial assistance from the Commonwealth for a wide range of local projects.

## RESTORING AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE

During the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Amherst's establishment as a separate colonial district, some citizens are making sure that they have an historic impact on their community. A cooperative effort between the Amherst Historical Commission, Dept of Public Works Cemetery Division, and Alpha Tau Gamma (ATG), the fraternity for the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, has resulted in the donation of both skilled labor and planting materials to begin the restoration of the three 1730-1870 sections of Amherst's oldest place—West Cemetery. In Fall 2008, ATG planted bulbs in the 1730s Knoll section of the cemetery, and further planting is planned for late spring. Mowing of these areas will be postponed until late summer, to allow the plants time to become well-established.

Established in 1730 by Hadley Town Meeting, which voted to give its East District residents, "liberty for a burying place", West Cemetery predates Amherst and contains some of the last unaltered topography in the community. The 1998 West Cemetery Preservation Plan calls for the restoration of the burying ground's historic landscapes, and describes those changes as follows:

*1730s Knoll* – Low hardy groundcovers and selected native meadow wildflowers.

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## THE AMHERST VILLAGE CENTER CONCEPT

On November 5, 2008, the 2009 draft Master Plan was submitted to the Planning Board for review and eventual adoption. The draft plan has a strong emphasis on the directing new residential development to existing village centers and neighborhoods, through sensitive infill and redevelopment, while acknowledging the need to carefully expand village centers and accommodate some appropriate new development in some outlying areas. Additionally, the plan cites a need to balance encouraging new residential development in existing centers with regulations protecting the historical character and residential life of existing neighborhoods.

Focusing new development into settled centers has been a community goal in Amherst since about 1728, when outlying houses first began to be built in the East District of the Hadley plantation. The historic New England settlement pattern that arose over the next 150 years consisted of densely settled village centers separated by large open stretches of farmland, forests and wetlands, and connected by roadways. The purpose of 'center' zoning districts are set forth in Section 2.0 of the Zoning Bylaw. They are the cumulative result of several decades of community planning intent and numerous Town Meeting votes. These purposes reflect the pattern of intended development described in the 1973 SCOG report, reinforced by numerous community planning actions since, and that is embodied in the intent of the draft Master Plan.

General Business (B-G) - The purpose of the B-G District is to provide for a mixed use area, of high density, containing a wide variety of commercial, office, residential, institutional, civic, and cultural uses. To this end, it is intended that this district be applied within the Town Center of Amherst.

General Residence (R-G) - The purpose of the R-G District is to provide for residential neighborhoods of medium to higher density in areas both near the Town Center and between the University and the Town Center. Such areas are convenient to the services, facilities, institutions and/or employment opportunities provided in the Town Center or by the University.

Village Center Business (B-VC) - The purpose of the B-VC District is to provide areas within the village centers of Amherst that allow for a mix of uses, including retail, commercial, office and housing of moderate to high density.

Village Center Residence (R-VC) - The purpose of the R-VC District is to provide for residential neighborhoods, within and adjacent to village centers, that are of medium densities and that allow a limited mix of residential and office uses. The R-VC is, in general, intended to provide for a transition between the Business Village Center District and surrounding residential districts.

Focusing development in village centers where infrastructure already exists can avoid Town costs and increase Town revenues. The high taxpayer costs of suburban sprawl—road maintenance, sewer/water lines, street lighting and fire/police/emergency medical service call areas are minimized. Housing is located near goods and services, employment, and transportation.

In order to achieve the village center concept, regulatory codes must be updated to ensure that infill and development are permitted, and encouraged.

When future development is directed into downtown and village centers, the protection of existing historical and neighborhood become more important. Areas appropriate for density increases and development will need to be evaluated on the basis of character, quality, and priority. Through emphasis on preservation and adaptive reuse, allowing a varying combination of preservation and redevelopment, and encouraging denser development of appropriate scale and design, the Town will be able to retain its traditional New England settlement pattern and character while pursuing sustainable growth for Amherst's future.

## KENDRICK PARK UPDATE

Kendrick Park is a 3.3 acre triangular “island” located at the north end of the downtown and partially surrounded by downtown uses. It serves as the northern entrance to Amherst Center. The park is bordered on the west by North Pleasant Street and a row of predominantly multifamily commercial residential rental buildings. Beyond that row to the west is a densely-settled historic residential neighborhood, with single and multifamily homes. On the east there is a shopping and business area, consisting of retail stores, banks, restaurants, and offices. At the northern tip of the park is the site of a busy four-way intersection that forms the connection between downtown Amherst and the University of Massachusetts. Immediately north of the intersection there are several residences and a motel. The southern edge of the UMass campus is within three blocks - easy walking distance- of the park. downtown Amherst wraps around the southern and eastern edge of the park.

The area of Kendrick Park was originally a residential area north of the downtown center which transitioned into farmland to the north and west. The formation of the Mount Pleasant Institute in 1827 placed the area between two destinations: the downtown and the new educational institution. But it was not until the coming of the railroad in 1853 and the rapid period of growth and expansion in the 1860's-80's accompanying the Civil War that downtown commercial activity and new downtown-edge residential neighborhoods grew north to embrace this area. What is now North Pleasant Street was cut west of the park area in 1860.

The idea for the park was born in the early part of the last century. In 1930 George Smith Kendrick, President of the Amherst Savings Bank, made a bequest to a trust to purchase a triangular, multifamily parceled piece of land in the town center and to build a public park, to be donated to the Town of Amherst. Mr. Kendrick, former president of the Amherst Savings Bank, first envisioned the park in about 1925 when he was 80 years old. He was offended by an ill-kept tenement building at the southern end of the park near the homes of several of his banking colleagues, and was determined to make the land an asset to the town rather than a liability.

Mr. Kendrick and his youngest sister, Jenny, both of whom were childless, agreed to leave the bulk of their wealth in a trust to finance the purchase of the park land. The trust was to purchase the individual parcels within the “island” when they came up for sale and when acquisition was complete, the land would be converted to a park. In January 2008, the last house in Kendrick Park was removed from its site and the Town has taken possession. —Continued on Back

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: JEFF BAGG

Jeffery Bagg began as Senior Planner on July 15, 2008. A native of Easthampton and the Valley, Jeff had in recent years been working for an environmental and planning consulting firm on Eastern Long Island. Jeff handles the highly complex and often contentious workload of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Jeff graduated in 2002 from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst with a bachelor's degree in natural resource conservation. Being a native of the area has helped Jeff to swiftly acclimate to his laborious position at the Amherst Planning Department. Sporting a mug of Amherst Coffee, Jeff can be found jetting around the Amherst Town Hall energetically researching development applications and regulations, helping citizens, and staffing the ZBA. His unique organizational skills are a benefit to the department and come in handy for a position that involves multi-tasking on many levels.



Prior to his work in Amherst, Jeff lived in New York State where he was approached by the recently-elected Green Party mayor of New Paltz to help establish an environmental conservation commission for the village. While in upstate New York, Jeff worked as a Fisheries and Wildlife Technician for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and was lucky enough to spend many days on the Hudson River.

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## RESTORING AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

*African-American Burial Site* – Shade-loving groundcovers (under the canopy of nearby trees), shrubs, interpretive sign, a path, and a bench.

*Town Tomb and surrounding area* - Groundcovers, shrubs, new trees, a path, and potential lighting.

The Amherst Historical Commission and Community Preservation Act Committee also included funds in an FY10 CPA historic preservation project to complete the more costly and extensive aspects of these landscape restoration projects.

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## KENDRICK PARK UPDATE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

The town manager, given the jurisdiction and task of designing a new Kendrick park, created the Kendrick Park Committee to consider options for use, beautification and preservation of Kendrick Park.

Since early 2008, the Kendrick Park committee has been meeting to discuss uses and issues involving the park. To better organize their strategies and ideas, they are split into four distinct sub categories: History & Aesthetics, Public Market, Natural & Landscape, and Recreation. Each of the subcommittees focused on specific uses for the park, met individually, then came together to share findings. The subcommittee concentrations are as described as followed:

History and Aesthetics - Studied the historic and aesthetic potential for Kendrick Park and made recommendations relative to the addition and operation of a number of different activities to include the historic and aesthetic markings throughout the park.

Natural and Landscape Subcommittee - Studied and made recommendations on matters relative to the natural and landscaping profile of Kendrick Park, and on the various issues that effect the natural environment in the park.

Public Market Subcommittee - Studied the feasibility of the creations of a public market at Kendrick Park and made recommendations regarding its location, operation, new construction, and all other matters relative to the public market at Kendrick Park. The subcommittee also studied the potential for a connection between the park and the commercial area immediately adjacent to the park.

Recreation Committee - Studied and made recommendations on the various recreational activities at Kendrick Park to include an ice skating rink, the placement of a gazebo, the placement of a bandstand for summer concerts; and a variety of other recreational activities that may be conducted at the park.

A Report Subcommittee has compiled the findings and research from the four Kendrick Park subcommittees in a draft Final Recommendations Report to be submitted to the Town Manager. The final Kendrick Park Committee report should be available in late May.

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## STAFF SPOTLIGHT : JEFF BAGG (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

After Jeff's work with the NYS DEC and local conservation commission, in 2005 he moved to eastern Long Island and worked as an environmental and development planner for a private consulting firm. There he met daily with property owners and helped them identify what regulations would apply to their property and helped them navigate the often complex environmental permitting process.

Jeff and his wife, Megan, currently live in Williamsburg where they enjoy kayaking, hiking and gardening in their free time.

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## BOARD & STAFF NEWS

**Stephen Shreiber** the Director of the Architecture and Design program at the University of Massachusetts, has recently joined the Planning Board.

**Ryan Lundergan** an intern in the Planning Department during the 2008-2009 academic year, completed his Master's degree in Regional Planning from the University of Massachusetts.

**David Webber** an attorney with Schatz, Schwartz and Fentin, P.C., in Springfield, recently joined the Planning Board.

**Tom Ehrgood** A director of 50th Reunion Giving at Amherst College, has recently joined the Zoning Board of Appeals

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Planning Briefs is available on our website at <http://www.amherstma.gov/planning>  
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